

Community Participation

Smart Growth began with a group of citizens who wanted to go beyond just reacting to development proposals; citizens who wanted to proactively shape the decisions that effect their communities and hence, their lives. Community participation remains at the heart of Smart Growth through opportunities that bring together all stakeholders in a community:

The community visioning process helps participants envision different development options through a presentation of different land use and planning options for streets, housing, public space, etc. After viewing a variety of images, participants register their preferences and vote on a development model for their own community.

Charettes are planning workshops in which interdisciplinary teams join to design a project: residents, builders, developers, planners, police and fire personnel, clergy, business owners, etc. People who would perhaps otherwise never interact come together to brainstorm and design their community, offering input that is listened to and considered. Working over a period of several days, they develop a common language and produce sketches and plans that are the basis of a development plan.

Charettes can be used to create a vision and plan for large topics such as transportation or housing, or can focus on specific, small geographic areas (commonly within a quarter-mile walking radius) or on “Main Street” of specific, pressing needs such as traffic calming.

Community participation is fostered through the efforts of known and respected community leaders: for example, Chambers of Commerce, clergy, school leaders, and non-partisan good government groups encourage residents to get involved in these processes because they offer the refreshing and unique opportunity to express concerns and offer insights that will be seriously regarded. In order to build consensus, charrette events engage participants in activities that build common values and they are only permitted to work on values commonly held by the group; problems and issues that are seen as group priority. The resulting designs benefit all stakeholders.

These processes ensure that development is equitable and has the support of the stakeholders of a community, while fostering new connections between community residents

Case examples

- In Huntington, Long Island, 600 residents came together to help identify community needs and to re-design an important downtown corridor, Gerard Street, using Smart Growth design principles. Engineering and construction drawings were developed from the design ideas generated in the charette, and more than \$200,000 has been secured for the first steps toward traffic-calming. From that weekend, task forces developed to address parking, plaza maintenance and financing for the plan. (For more information, go to <http://www.visionhuntington.org>)
- In northern Utah, a partnership of 130 diverse and bi-partisan leaders joined to study the effects of long-term growth in their region. Workshops were held in six communities to determine the residents' values and to learn what they wanted to preserve or change in the face of the state's rapid growth. Alternative growth scenarios were developed and analyzed to determine and demonstrate the costs and impacts of each scenario on population, infrastructure costs, air quality, water, open space and recreation preservation, traffic, affordable housing, and business patterns. This led to a phased growth strategy that was launched in 2000. (For more information, go to <http://www.envisionutah.org>)
- In Cape Cod, Massachusetts, 400 households participated in a transportation survey as part of the Human Conditions 2001 Project of the Barnstable County Department of Human Services. The six-page survey, printed in 3 languages for distribution among the Cape's multi-lingual community, formed the basis of a larger research project, and its findings were used to develop comprehensive 5 and 20 - year transportation plans for the region. (For more information, go to <http://www.bchumanservices.net>)
- Onondaga County, New York, formulated a plan to promote the best possible growth for the County with the input of 20 architects and planners, state and county departments of transportation, civic organizations, developers, environmentalists, and more than 1,500 citizens. The "Settlement Plan" includes a county plan, plans for individual neighborhoods, guidelines for traditional neighborhood development (TND), and traditional neighborhood development codes. (For more information, contact info@.dpz.com)